

CURRENT SURGICAL MANAGEMENT OF COLORECTAL CANCER: AN UPDATED REVIEW

Nekov Muhammadali Ulug'bek o'g'li
DSc (Medicine) Rakhimov Oqiljon Abduxalilovich
Komiljonov Komronshox Doniyorbekovich
Republican Specialized Scientific and
Practical Medical Center of Oncology and Radiology Surgeon
E-mail: muhammadalinekov007@gmail.com
Phone: +998 91 791 00 01
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Abstract: Colorectal cancer remains one of the most prevalent malignancies worldwide and represents a leading cause of cancer-related morbidity and mortality. Surgical resection continues to be the cornerstone of curative treatment for both colon and rectal cancers, with advances in surgical techniques, perioperative care, and multidisciplinary strategies significantly improving patient outcomes. Over the past two decades, the evolution of minimally invasive approaches, refinement of total mesorectal excision, adoption of sphincter-preserving procedures, and integration of neoadjuvant and adjuvant therapies have transformed colorectal cancer management. This thesis provides an updated overview of current surgical strategies for colorectal cancer, emphasizing evidence-based approaches, oncological principles, and outcome-oriented decision-making. The role of laparoscopic and robotic surgery, management of locally advanced disease, and factors influencing surgical selection are critically reviewed based on contemporary clinical guidelines and high-quality studies.

Keywords

Colorectal cancer, surgical management, total mesorectal excision, minimally invasive surgery, oncologic outcomes

Introduction

Colorectal cancer (CRC) accounts for approximately 10% of all newly diagnosed cancers globally and remains a major public health challenge [1]. The disease encompasses malignancies arising from the colon and rectum, which differ in anatomical location, biological behavior, and therapeutic strategies. Despite advances in systemic therapy and radiotherapy, surgical intervention remains the primary modality with curative intent for localized and locally advanced disease [2].

The fundamental objectives of colorectal cancer surgery include complete tumor removal with adequate margins, appropriate lymphadenectomy, preservation of function, and minimization of perioperative morbidity. Historical outcomes of CRC surgery were limited by high rates of local recurrence and postoperative complications. However, the introduction of standardized oncologic techniques, such as complete mesocolic excision for colon cancer and total mesorectal excision for rectal cancer, has significantly improved local control and long-term survival [3].

In recent years, surgical management has evolved further through minimally invasive techniques, enhanced recovery protocols, and individualized treatment planning within multidisciplinary teams. This thesis aims to synthesize current evidence regarding surgical strategies in colorectal cancer, focusing on techniques, indications, and outcomes supported by factual data from authoritative sources.

Methodology

This thesis is based on a structured review of international clinical guidelines, randomized controlled trials, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses published in peer-reviewed journals. Primary sources include guidelines from oncological and surgical societies, as well as landmark trials evaluating surgical techniques and outcomes in colorectal cancer [4], [5].

The literature selection prioritized studies with clearly defined methodologies, adequate sample sizes, and long-term follow-up data. Emphasis was placed on publications addressing surgical principles, minimally invasive approaches, and oncological outcomes. Data were analyzed descriptively, focusing on consensus recommendations and reproducible findings rather than speculative or experimental results.

Results

Surgical resection remains the only potentially curative treatment for non-metastatic colorectal cancer [6]. For colon cancer, standard treatment consists of segmental colectomy with high ligation of feeding vessels and removal of at least 12 regional lymph nodes for accurate staging [7]. Complete mesocolic excision has been shown to reduce local recurrence and improve disease-free survival when performed according to oncologic principles [8].

Rectal cancer surgery is guided by tumor location, stage, and relationship to the sphincter complex. Total mesorectal excision is considered the gold standard, achieving local recurrence rates below 10% in specialized centers [9]. Sphincter-preserving procedures, such as low anterior resection with coloanal anastomosis, are increasingly feasible due to improved surgical techniques and neoadjuvant therapy [10].

Minimally invasive surgery has become widely adopted in colorectal cancer treatment. Large randomized trials have demonstrated that laparoscopic colectomy provides equivalent oncological outcomes compared to open surgery, with benefits including reduced postoperative pain, shorter hospital stay, and faster recovery [11]. Robotic surgery, particularly in rectal cancer, offers improved visualization and dexterity, which may facilitate precise pelvic dissection, although long-term oncologic superiority has not been conclusively demonstrated [12].

Analysis and Discussion

The current surgical management of colorectal cancer reflects a balance between oncologic radicality and functional preservation. Evidence consistently supports that adherence to standardized surgical principles is more critical than the choice of surgical access alone [3], [9]. High-quality total mesorectal excision, for example, remains the most significant determinant of local control in rectal cancer.

The integration of neoadjuvant chemoradiotherapy for locally advanced rectal cancer has enabled tumor downstaging, increasing rates of sphincter preservation without compromising oncologic safety [10]. Surgical timing following neoadjuvant therapy has also been optimized, with delayed surgery associated with higher rates of pathological complete response in selected patients [5].

Minimally invasive techniques have reshaped colorectal surgery practice. Laparoscopic approaches are now considered standard for colon cancer in many guidelines, provided surgeons have adequate expertise [11]. Robotic systems address some limitations of

laparoscopy, particularly in narrow pelvic anatomy, but higher costs and longer operative times remain challenges [12].

Despite technological progress, patient-related factors such as age, comorbidities, tumor stage, and anatomical considerations continue to influence surgical decision-making. Multidisciplinary evaluation is essential to tailor surgical strategies and optimize outcomes. Importantly, long-term survival is closely linked to appropriate lymph node assessment and margin status, reinforcing the importance of surgical quality [7].

Conclusion

Surgical treatment remains the cornerstone of curative therapy for colorectal cancer. Advances in oncologic techniques, minimally invasive surgery, and multidisciplinary care have significantly improved both survival and quality of life for patients. Current evidence supports standardized surgical principles, such as complete mesocolic excision and total mesorectal excision, as key determinants of oncological success.

While laparoscopic and robotic approaches offer clear perioperative benefits, their effectiveness depends on surgeon experience and adherence to oncologic standards. Future progress in colorectal cancer surgery will likely focus on further personalization of treatment, refinement of minimally invasive techniques, and integration of surgical innovation with systemic and radiotherapeutic advances.

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